



## B. Conflict from Within (Nehemiah 5:1-19)

1. The source of the conflict (Nehemiah 5:1-5)
  - a. The incrimination of the conflict (Nehemiah 5:1)
    - (1) The expression—*“there was a great cry”*
    - (2) The offended—*“of the people and of their wives”*
    - (3) The offenders—*“their **brethren** the Jews”*
    - (4) Note: It is unlikely that this problem came about overnight; however, so long as people were focused on opposition from without, or upon building, it went unexpressed and unresolved.
  - b. The complaints in the conflict (Nehemiah 5:2-4)
    - (1) The first complaint—insufficient food supply (Nehemiah 5:2)
      - a) The expression of the complaint—*“there were that said”*
      - b) The problem in the complaint
        - i) The rising population—*“We, our sons, and our daughters, are many”*
        - ii) The necessity of food—*“therefore we take up corn for them, that we may eat, and live”*
    - (2) The second complaint—insufficient funds (Nehemiah 5:3)
      - a) The expression of the complaint—*“Some also there were that said”*
      - b) The problem in the complaint
        - i) The people mortgaged their possessions.
          - (a) Their lands
          - (b) Their vineyards
          - (c) Their houses
          - (d) Note: When the people returned with Zerubbabel, they returned unto their own cities (Nehemiah 7:5-6; Ezra 2:1, 70; Ezra 3:1) to work their own lands. Now they were having to mortgage that for which they had worked so hard to reestablish.
        - ii) To buy corn, because of the dearth; Note: A dearth is a time where food is scarce. The scarcity of food would have caused inflation. The rising costs demanded that people choose between food and their possessions.
    - (3) The third complaint—burdensome taxes (Nehemiah 5:4)
      - a) The expression of the complaint—*“There were also that said”*
      - b) The problem in the complaint
        - i) The people borrowed money upon their lands and vineyards.
        - ii) They did so to cover the cost of the king’s tribute.
    - (4) Note: It appears that the variety of problems impacted people in varying ways. Different people spoke up of different conflicts and how they were troubled as a result, but they all shared in that they were suffering.



- c. The demise of the conflict (Nehemiah 5:5)
- (1) The likeness of the demise—*“now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children”*
- a) The possibilities of interpretation
- i) The reference is to brethren and their children in the land of captivity—Babylon or Persia. If this is the true interpretation, although these people had left the land of captivity and returned to the homeland, they saw themselves as captives just as the people who had remained in Babylon and Persia.
- ii) The reference is to ownership and points to the brethren in the land of Israel to whom they had become debtors (Nehemiah 5:1). If this is the true interpretation, the people felt as though they and their children were now owned by their brethren and that they were servants or slaves unto their Jewish brethren.
- b) The accuracies of either—The first part of this verse is often ignored because of its supposed lack of clarity, but the reality is that either of these interpretations would be an accurate assessment of the situation. The people had come to the land with hopes of change and liberty and now found neither.
- c) Note: Consider the provisions within the law of Moses for Jewish people in their dealings, one with another.
- i) Jewish people would only be in servitude to fellow Jews for six years and, if desired, would go free in the seventh year (Exodus 21:1-11).
- ii) Jewish people were supposed to give to fellow Jews, if poor, to sufficiently to meet their needs (Deuteronomy 15:7-11).
- iii) A Jew was not to lend to another Jew and require usury (Exodus 22:25).
- iv) A Jew was not to compel a fellow Jew to serve as a bondservant, but as a hired servant (Leviticus 25:39-43). This would likely be the difference between an servant and a slave.
- (2) The problem of the demise
- a) We bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants.
- b) Some of our daughters are brought unto bondage already.
- (3) The impossibility of the demise
- a) The people had had valuable assets, but now other men owned them.
- i) Lands
- ii) Vineyards
- b) Now, it was not in their power to redeem their families.



2. The response to the conflict (Nehemiah 5:6-13)
  - a. Nehemiah's response to the conflict (Nehemiah 5:6-11)
    - (1) Nehemiah's internal contemplations (Nehemiah 5:6-7)
      - a) His righteous anger (Nehemiah 5:6)
        - i) The declaration of his anger—*"I was...angry"*
        - ii) The extent of his anger—*"very angry"*
        - iii) The source of his anger
          - (a) When I heard their cry
          - (b) When I heard these words
      - b) His patient meditation—*"Then I consulted with myself"* (Nehemiah 5:7)
        - i) Nehemiah had great anger towards the Jews who had enslaved their brethren.
        - ii) Man tends to put aside wisdom and explode in his anger; oftentimes, causing more harm than good (see Proverbs 27:4-5).
        - iii) Yet, Nehemiah recognized his anger swelling within him and rather than reacting in anger, he took a moment and *"consulted with myself"* (Nehemiah 5:7). That is, he took a moment and think it through, compose himself, and formulate a right response (consider Ephesians 4:26).
        - iv) Godless man prides himself of his sinful actions resulting from his anger, but that is not the example that Nehemiah gives. He was angry, with righteous anger, and conducted himself aright in his anger.
    - (2) Nehemiah's rebuke of the people (Nehemiah 5:7-11)
      - a) The recipients of Nehemiah's rebuke (Nehemiah 5:7)
        - i) The nobles
        - ii) The rulers
      - b) The reason for Nehemiah's rebuke (Nehemiah 5:7)
        - i) Their actions—*"Ye exact usury"*
          - (a) God had set forth that a Jew was not to exact usury, which is increase (interest) on what was lent (Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:35-37), but to fear God (see also Ezekiel 22:12-16).
          - (b) Nehemiah's anger stemmed from the fact that the leaders were disobedient concerning the word of the Lord.
        - ii) Their union—*"every one"*
        - iii) Their victims—*"his brother"*
      - c) The witnesses to Nehemiah's rebuke (Nehemiah 5:7)
        - i) The act—*"I set a great assembly against them."*
        - ii) The wisdom—Nehemiah followed the principles of God (Deuteronomy 19:15) and brought a great assembly against the accused.



- d) The content of Nehemiah's rebuke (Nehemiah 5:8-10)
  - i) Nehemiah's interrogation (Nehemiah 5:8)
    - (a) The success in redemption—*"We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen."*
    - (b) The question of bondage
      - (i) Will ye even sell your brethren?
      - (ii) Shall they be sold unto us?
    - (c) The response
      - (i) They held their peace.
      - (ii) They found nothing to answer.
  - ii) Nehemiah's condemnation (Nehemiah 5:9)
    - (a) The statement of condemnation—*"It is not good that ye do"*
    - (b) The appeal in the condemnation—*"ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies"* (see 2 Samuel 12:1-14; Romans 2:21-24). Note: Nehemiah was concerned with the testimony the Jews held in the eyes of the nations surrounding them.
  - iii) Nehemiah's example (Nehemiah 5:10)
    - (a) His right—*"I...and my brethren, and my servants, might exact of them money and corn."* Note: Obviously, Nehemiah understood that he would have a right to take some money and supplies from the Jews for the services he offered (see Nehemiah 5:14).
    - (b) His refusal—Although not stated until later in the context, Nehemiah did not abuse his right.
    - (c) His request—*"I pray you, let us leave off this usury."* Note: Nehemiah, as a great leader, said *us* rather than *you*. A great leader identifies himself with those he leads and takes part of the responsibility for their failures.
  - iv) Nehemiah's command (Nehemiah 5:11)
    - (a) The action in the command—*"Restore"*
      - (i) Lands
      - (ii) Vineyards
      - (iii) Oliveyards
      - (iv) Houses
      - (v) The hundredth part of the money
      - (vi) The hundredth part of the corn
      - (vii) The hundredth part of the wine
      - (viii) The hundredth part of the oil
    - (b) The appeal in the command—*"I pray you"*
    - (c) The beneficiaries of the command—*"to them"*
    - (d) The urgency of the command—*"even this day"*



- b. The people's response to Nehemiah (Nehemiah 5:12)
  - (1) They promised to restore what they had taken.
  - (2) They promised to require nothing else of them going forward.
  - (3) They assured Nehemiah that they would do as he requested.
- c. The closing words of the two parties (Nehemiah 5:12-13)
  - (1) The accountability requested—Upon the nobles' and rulers' agreement to restore, Nehemiah brought the priests and had the nobles and rulers give an oath before the priests that they would keep their word (Nehemiah 5:12).
  - (2) The sobriety demonstrated (Nehemiah 5:13)
    - a) Nehemiah's action—*"I shook my lap"* (see Matthew 10:14; Acts 13:51; Acts 18:6)
    - b) Nehemiah's explanation
      - i) The threat—*"So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labour...even thus be he shaken out, and emptied"*
      - ii) The requisite—*"that performeth not this promise"*
      - iii) Note: In short, any man who made this oath and failed to keep it would be shook out by God and "emptied" just as they had emptied their brethren.
  - (3) The congregation's acceptance (Nehemiah 5:13)
    - a) Their acknowledgment—*"the congregation said, Amen, and praised the LORD."* Note: The word *amen* is an expression of acquiescence. It indicates understanding, acknowledgment, and agreement with what was said (see 1 Corinthians 14:15-17).
    - b) Their obedience—*"the people did according to this promise"*
- 3. The example in the conflict (Nehemiah 5:14-19)
  - a. An example in sacrifice (Nehemiah 5:14-15)
    - (1) The manner of Nehemiah's leadership (Nehemiah 5:14)
      - a) Nehemiah's opportunity
        - i) He began his governorship in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes (see Nehemiah 2:1).
        - ii) In the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes' reign, Nehemiah returned to Shushan unto the king for "certain days" (Nehemiah 13:6).
        - iii) The point of the passage is to show that Nehemiah had the opportunity to take from the people for twelve years. This serves as much more of an example than if he would have only served in the role for a few weeks or months.
      - b) Nehemiah's choice
        - i) The declaration of his choice—*"I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor."*
        - ii) The cause of his choice—Nehemiah's fear of God motivated him not to use his position to be a burden to the people (consider 2 Corinthians 11:9).



- (2) The manner of others' leadership (Nehemiah 5:15)
    - a) The former governors had been chargeable unto the people.
      - i) Taking bread
      - ii) Taking wine
      - iii) Taking forty shekels of silver
    - b) Even their servants bare rule over the people.
  - (3) The stated difference between the two—*"so did not I, because of the fear of God"* (Nehemiah 5:15)
- b. An example in service (Nehemiah 5:16)
- (1) Nehemiah and his servants focused on the work.
    - a) Nehemiah *"continued in the work of this wall."*
    - b) His servants *"were gathered thither unto the work."*
  - (2) Nehemiah and his servants put off the buying of land. Note: Recall that the Jews forsook the work and focused on their own homes. Nehemiah and his servants refused to get sidetracked.
- c. An example in self-sufficiency (Nehemiah 5:17-18)
- (1) Nehemiah's hospitality (Nehemiah 5:17)
    - a) There were at Nehemiah's table 150 of the Jews and rulers.
    - b) There were also heathen that came unto him.
  - (2) Nehemiah's provisions (Nehemiah 5:18)
    - a) The frequency of the provisions—*"that which was prepared for me daily"*
    - b) The list of the provisions
      - i) One ox
      - ii) Six choice sheep
      - iii) Fowls
      - iv) Once in ten days store of all sorts of wine
  - (3) Nehemiah's sufficiency (Nehemiah 5:18)
    - a) Nehemiah provided for over 150 people on a daily basis and *"yet for all this"* he required not the bread of the governor.
    - b) He bore this burden himself and demonstrated his care of all the Jews *"because the bondage was heavy upon this people."* Note: Even though a large group of Jews returned to Judah with Zerubbabel and Ezra and occupied their own cities, they were still in bondage to the Persians. Even in Jesus' time they were ruled by the Romans.
- d. An example in supplication (Nehemiah 5:19)
- (1) The recipient of his supplication—*"my God"*
  - (2) The request of his supplication—*"Think upon me...for good"*
  - (3) The merit in his supplication—*"according to all that I have done for this people"*
  - (4) Note: This was not a prideful request, but a humble desire and hope that the Lord was well pleased with how he had served. This should, likewise, be our desires in all that we do; do all we do so as to please the Lord (consider Revelation 4:11).